

## **Emergency Preparedness and Special Populations - Community Planning**

Public health and emergency response planning requires that you develop a process for working with populations with special needs. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has distributed a *Special Populations Guide for Local Boards of Health* to assist in the development of this process.

In addition, MDPH has developed the following guidance after meeting with local boards of health and service providers. Your municipality may want to consider utilizing the following approach in order to begin enhancing your existing community emergency management plans to include provisions for special populations. While this document is being sent to local boards of health, it is suggested that the local board of health partner with another local service/agency (e.g., local police) to begin planning.

1) Hold a meeting with community officials and other community members who may provide direct services and/or communication to special populations in your community. Recommended attendees of this 'special populations committee' would include:

Local Public Health  
Local Fire  
Local Police  
Local Emergency Medical Service (EMS) representative  
Local Council on Aging  
Local Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator  
Local Multicultural Director  
Local Emergency Management Director  
Long Term Care representative  
Mental Health/Substance Abuse clinic representative  
Local Education Agency representative  
Local refugee/immigrant resettlement agency  
Local Homeless Shelter representative  
Local Community Health Center representative  
Local Hospital representative

*(Use the MDPH Special Populations Guide for Local Boards of Health ([http://www.mass.gov/dph/bioterrorism/advisorygrps/pdfs/spop\\_guidance\\_5\\_05.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/dph/bioterrorism/advisorygrps/pdfs/spop_guidance_5_05.pdf)) for assistance in constructing an attendee list. The guide also provides a working definition of special populations).*

2) Begin your meeting with a brief overview of your community's current emergency preparedness planning and the community emergency management structure.

3) Have an open discussion about special populations (who are they, where are they, how to communicate, etc) and emergency preparedness. Discussions may venture into large topics such as city/town evacuation or into specialized areas such as dialysis patients. In order to resolve many of your issues, you will find that your town needs a solid planning foundation. Here is how you can build that foundation:

4) Identify attainable goals to begin and to build upon. Some communities are doing the following:

- Develop a contact list for special population facilities (e.g., Long Term Care Facilities<sup>1</sup>, group homes<sup>2</sup>, schools, day care centers, etc)
- Assess whether these facilities have emergency preparedness plans in place, whether the facilities are included in the local Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, whether the facilities participate in state/community drills/exercises, etc.
- Have community outreach workers who perform home visits in the community disseminate a Family Disaster Plan and Family Emergency Card to the individuals they serve (One version is available here: [http://www.mass.gov/samh/pdfs/dph\\_family\\_displan.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/samh/pdfs/dph_family_displan.pdf)) They can also disseminate the 9-1-1 Disability Indicator Program information ([http://www.mass.gov/portal/site/massgovportal/menuitem.8df13acb79c731c14db4a11030468a0c/?pageID=eopsterminal&L=5&L0=Home&L1=Crime+Prevention+%26+Personal+Safety&L2=Report+an+Emergency&L3=Enhanced++911&L4=About+E9-1-1&sid=Eeops&b=terminalcontent&f=](http://www.mass.gov/portal/site/massgovportal/menuitem.8df13acb79c731c14db4a11030468a0c/?pageID=eopsterminal&L=5&L0=Home&L1=Crime+Prevention+%26+Personal+Safety&L2=Report+an+Emergency&L3=Enhanced++911&L4=About+E9-1-1&sid=Eeops&b=terminalcontent&f=))). During follow-up visits, outreach workers can ask whether forms were understood/completed/mailed.
- Assess current communication capabilities and methodologies (ethnic media, interpreter/translator, phone trees, community access TV) that would be used to disseminate information to special population facilities and individuals in your community
- Determine how to best collect and manage this information
- Decide if other individuals need to join the committee
- Schedule regular meetings

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<sup>1</sup> DPH is currently working with DPH-Center for Health Quality Assurance with respect to emergency preparedness planning and the LTCF's they license

<sup>2</sup> DPH is currently working with DMH with respect to emergency preparedness planning and the group homes they license

5) The goal of your planning efforts is to include provisions for populations with special needs in your community's emergency management plans – not to create a separate special populations plan. To help with this process it is recommended to share your community's comprehensive emergency management plan with your special populations committee.

MDPH staff can attend these meetings to share other community ideas, provide information about Commonwealth initiatives, and offer technical assistance.

If you have any questions or would like additional assistance, please contact your Regional Coordinator or Jeff Timperi, Behavioral Health and Special Populations Liaison for the MDPH's Center for Emergency Preparedness at [Jeffrey.Timperi@state.ma.us](mailto:Jeffrey.Timperi@state.ma.us) or at 617.624.5275.